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ABSTRACT

Using "Books for College Libraries" as a standard reference against which to compare the Purdue University Calumet Campus library collection, a quantitative analysis of the library's holdings in various subject areas was done during the 1973-74 academic year. For each of the 65 subject areas selected, randomly chosen entries in "Books for College Libraries" were checked against the library's catalog. Statistically it was inferred that the library's holdings in most disciplines do not compare favorably with the holdings identified as important to a college library. In only five cases were more than 60 percent of the volumes in "Books for College Libraries" subject area samples actually found in the Puredue University Calumet Campus library. (DGC)

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AN APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COLLECTION

by

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AN APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY COLLECTION

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Quantitative analysis of a library collection is a relatively simple undertaking. Qualitative analysis of the same poses a much more complicated task. To begin with, there has been precious little written on the subject. The few articles published over the years, by and large, deal in theories of analysis. True, there are some recorded instances of actual undertaking of qualitative evaluation of library materials. Such endeavors, however, are invariably limited in scope. That is only a selected bibliographic area is chosen for the purpose.[1]

The lack of appreciable activity in the area is understandable. There is, no doubt, apprehension with regard to standard of reference and methodology. But the greatest deterrent is the sheer immensity of such a task. Many academic libraries, to no one's surprise, contain within their walls astonishingly large inventories. Just to maintain the materials in some reasonably orderly fashion is a sizable task in itself.

The difficulties posed by overwhelming volume numbers are further complicated by the nature of materials held. Academic library collections are diverse in their nature. Aside from such specialized collection as U.S. Government documents, U.N. documents, state documents, the undergraduate library--to name a few--there might exist several subject collections. And, of course, there is the serials collection. No single evaluation scheme can be applied to all the materials. Hence, across-the-board qualitative evaluation remains only a dream.

[1] Marcia S. Stayer, "A Creative Approach to Collection Evaluation," Institute of Professional Librarians of Ontario Quarterly, 13 (July, 1971), pp. 24-26.

Not to be overlooked is the monetary factor. Libraries are staffed for day-to-day operations. Staffs of most libraries are fully engaged in the performance of essential services. Few, if any, enjoy the financial support needed to plunge into a prolonged self-study, even though such a study might carry with it a promise of substantial long-term benefits to the parent institution.

The word "Quality," when applied to library collections, is an abstract notion. One should have little difficulty in detecting quality or lack of it in a specific work. This ability to distinguish a superior work from a mediocre or a poor one is of very little use in the evaluation process of collections. For here, the quality must be assessed in the aggregate. How does one assess quality in the aggregate?

The question posed above--necessary as it is--raises still another question. Namely, is it possible to assess quality of a collection without a quantitative study of the same? As should be expected, there is a difference of opinion.[2] Some believe quantitative dimensions of a collection should have little, if anything, to do with its quality. Others take a diametrical stand in their position on the question. The school espousing the latter thought states flatly: "It is possible to have quality where quantity exists--it is impossible, however, to have quality without quantity."[3] I, for one, do not agree with the latter position. It seems there is a pressing need to draw a line between quality and adequacy of a collection. A collection may be quite good, and yet inadequate for reasons of its size.[4]

A decision was made to conduct qualitative assessment of the library's monograph (book) collection at Purdue University Calumet Campus. Before work could begin, a standard of refer-

[2]R. Marvin McInnis, "Research Collections: An Approach to the Assessment of Quality," Institute of Professional Librarians of Ontario Quarterly, 13 (July, 1971), pp. 13-21.

[3]"College Library Standards: Questions and Answers," College & Research Libraries News, 35, No. 6 (November, 1974), 249.

[4]Enrollment statistics, university's curricula and, of course, research in process should be taken into account prior to passing judgment on adequacy.

ence had to be selected. The literature on the subject--such as could be found--offered some insight. One thing was clear, however. The problem did not lend itself to an easy, clear-cut resolution. An extended period of pondering was required. A number of approaches were considered and evaluated. The evaluation process yielded the needed insight. It became apparent that a choice of a standard of reference should depend, to a large extent, on the nature of the library collection under study.

There is a general inclination to view all university libraries as research libraries. In reality this is not the case. The overriding consideration should be the library's contents--not its status. We may correctly assume, however, that every university library has research materials in some quantity. This library is no exception.

The library at Purdue University Calumet Campus has fewer than 90,000 volumes.[5] The figure includes a substantial ratio of bound periodical volumes.[6] Even more important is the fact that this library evolved around an undergraduate curricula. This in itself greatly influenced the nature of the library's book collection. With these facts in mind, it can be safely stated that this library houses basically an undergraduate collection, even though it does hold some significant research materials. This was the reason why the citation approach was ruled out as a possible standard of reference.[7] The citation method is best suited for evaluation of research collections. Collections which do not meet research criterium can be better scrutinized by other methods--notably the "model" college libraries.[8]

[5]Purdue University Calumet Campus Library and Audio-Visual Service, Annual Report: Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1974 (Hammond, Indiana), p. 1.

[6]Holdings of a typical undergraduate branch library are usually in the 80,000-100,000-volume range.

[7]The citation approach calls for checking for availability in the library being assessed the citations from published research in the selected discipline. The use of a random sample technique is essential to the viability of this method.

[8]McInnis, p. 16.

The accepted qualitative procedure consist of checking library's holdings against subject bibliographies or major library catalogs of specialized nature, such as the catalog of the Baker Library for business and economics. Libraries with primarily basic collections[9] often choose the Choice opening day collections or Books for College Libraries as tools for evaluation.[10] The objective of such a procedure is to find whether the library has a high proportion of the literature contained in the selected bibliography. As was already pointed out, it is impossible to assess a library collection en masse. A collection has to be divided into segments by format, i.e., books (monographs), serials, audio-visual materials, possibly microforms and government documents. Each of the segments will require one or more bibliographies as the standard of reference.

With respect to Purdue University Calumet Campus Library, it was decided to delimit this study to books. The decision primarily rested on the knowledge that the core of the collection is in this format. Following the decision, Books for College Libraries was selected as the standard of reference. The choice of one bibliography over others should not preclude a multiple-bibliography approach. By this is meant that the selected segment of the collection can be also checked against other comparable bibliography or bibliographies.[11] The multi-bibliography approach is desirable for obvious reasons. This study had to be limited to one bibliography. Time was the determing factor for this decision.

Whatever bibliography is chosen as a standard of reference, it comes down to the subjectively determined choice of someone or some group of individuals. With that in mind, the

[9]The basic collection of a college or university library constitutes the foundation upon which the research and special collections rest. The basic collection is usually thought of as those materials which are essential to a college or university. It often forms the cornerstone of undergraduate collection.

[10]Barbara Golden, "A Method of Quantitatively Evaluating a University Library Collection," Library Resources and Technical Services, 18, No. 3 (Summer, 1974), 268-69.

[11]William Webb, "Project CoEd: A University Library Collection Evaluation and Development Program," Library Resources and Technical Services, 12, No. 4 (Fall, 1969), 458-60.

aim of this study is not to arrive at the absolute. Rather, it is hoped, the study will provide information that is highly pertinent to a judgment of quality of the collection.

Once the standard of reference was chosen, functional evaluation scheme had to be devised or found. It was apparent from the beginning that a random sample technique was in order. The technique that was finally adapted for this study parallels the one used, to assess library collections, at the University of Colorado at Boulder.[12]

An essential part of any sampling technique is the size of the sample. Since size of population[13] varies greatly from discipline to discipline, samples of different density had to be used. A total of four samples were selected. They were: 15 percent for a population of less than 100; 10 percent for population of 100 to 1,000; 5 percent for population up to 2,000; 1 percent for population over 2,000.

The implementation of the technique was quite simple. It began with a numerical count of the titles in the bibliography, by discipline. Selection of the appropriate sample was made. Titles were marked at equal intervals, according to the dictates of the sample used. The titles so marked were looked up in the Author/Title card catalog. Titles which were in the library collection were checked (✓). Finally, the titles the library owned were added up and percentages derived. Table I illustrates both the technique and the results.

TABLE I

Discipline	Population	Sample Size	Library Has	% Holdings
Home Economics	70	15% - 11 titles	0	0%
Psychology	858	10% - 86 titles	37	43%
Philosophy	1,509	5% - 75 titles	28	37%
History--				
United States	2,787	1% - 28 titles	19	68%

[12]Webb, 457-462.

[13]Population in this context constitutes the sum of titles contained in Books for College Libraries for a given discipline.

The work associated with the random sampling was done by two clerical staff members of the Library Acquisitions. As could be expected, it was an on-and-off operation.

All entries in the bibliography and the library's public card catalog were treated alike. That is, differences in edition, date of publication and publisher were not considered. Library holdings of multi-volume works were not checked for completeness. Bringing these facts to light may raise some eyebrows. These factors, however, were not significant enough to adversely influence the study.

Table II reveals the results of the study. All disciplines are fitted into the Library of Congress classification scheme.

TABLE II

Discipline	LC Class.	Population	Sample Size	Library Has	% of Population
General Works	AC-AZ	83	100% - 83 titles	36	43%
Philosophy	B-BD	1,509	5% - 75 titles	28	37%
Psychology	BF	858	10% - 86 titles	37	43%
Aesthetics	BH	43	15% - 6 titles	3	50%
Ethics	LJ	173	10% - 17 titles	8	47%
Religion	BL-BX	2,183	1% - 22 titles	5	23%
Auxiliary Sciences of History (History of Civilization)	CB-CT	427	10% - 43 titles	15	35%
General History	D	1,003	5% - 50 titles	10	20%
History--Great Britain	DA	852	10% - 85 titles	23	27%
History--Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia	DB	80	15% - 12 titles	6	50%
History--France	DC	393	10% - 39 titles	9	23%
History--Germany	DD	294	10% - 29 titles	6	21%
History--Greece, Italy, and Netherlands	DE-DJ	498	10% - 50 titles	7	14%
History--Russia, Poland and Finland	DK	363	10% - 36 titles	7	19%
History--Scandinavia	DL	61	15% - 9 titles	1	11%
History--Spain and Portugal	DP	114	15% - 17 titles	5	29%
History--Switzerland, Turkey and Balkan States	DQ-DR	109	15% - 16 titles	4	25%
History--Asia	DS	1,302	5% - 65 titles	11	17%
History--Africa	DT	502	10% - 50 titles	7	14%

Discipline	LC Class.	Population	Sample Size	Library Has	% of Population
History--Australia and Oceania	DU	163	10% - 16 titles	1	6%
History--General America	E 1-143	252	10% - 25 titles	9	36%
History--United States	E 151-F 1-975	2,787	1% - 28 titles	19	68%
History--Canada	F 1001-1140	179	10% - 18 titles	2	11%
History--Mexico	F 1201-1392	144	10% - 14 titles	6	43%
History--Latin America	F 1401-3799	452	10% - 45 titles	16	36%
Geography	G-GF	422	10% - 42 titles	12	29%
Anthropology	GN-GT	416	10% - 42 titles	13	31%
Recreation	GV	458	10% - 46 titles	9	20%
General Social Sciences and Statistics	H-HA	186	10% - 19 titles	8	42%
Economics	HB-HJ	3,745	1% - 37 titles	8	22%
Sociology	HM-HX	1,886	5% - 94 titles	18	19%
Political Science	J-JX	2,033	1% - 20 titles	6	30%
Law	K	699	10% - 70 titles	12	17%
Education	L-LT	1,242	5% - 62 titles	20	32%
Music	ML-MT	1,509	5% - 75 titles	20	27%
Fine Arts	N-NK	2,449	1% - 24 titles	4	17%

Discipline	LC Class.	Population	Sample Size	Library Has	% of Population
General Language and Literature	P	161	10% - 16 titles	10	63%
Classical Language and Literature	PA	620	10% - 62 titles	26	42%
Modern European Languages	PB-PH	984	10% - 98 titles	29	30%
Oriental Language and Literature	PJ-PL	415	10% - 42 titles	3	7%
General Literature	PN	1,897	5% - 95 titles	34	36%
French Literature	PQ 1-3999	1,554	5% - 78 titles	35	45%
Italian Literature	PQ 4001-5999	260	10% - 26 titles	6	23%
Spanish and Portugese Literature	PQ 6001-9999	529	10% - 53 titles	29	55%
English Literature	PR	5,997	1% - 60 titles	30	50%
American Literature	PS	3,920	1% - 39 titles	24	62%
German Literature	PT 1-4899	634	10% - 63 titles	30	48%
Dutch and Scandinavian Literature	PT 5001-9999	143	10% - 14 titles	2	14%
General Science	Q	287	10% - 29 titles	11	38%
Mathematics	QA	600	10% - 60 titles	35	58%
Astronomy	QB	182	10% - 18 titles	5	28%
Physics	QC	537	10% - 54 titles	35	65%
Chemistry	QD	305	10% - 31 titles	21	68%
Geology	QE	231	10% - 23 titles	2	9%
Natural History and Biology	QH	386	10% - 39 titles	20	51%
Botany	QK	129	10% - 13 titles	5	38%
Zoology	QL	336	10% - 34 titles	14	41%

Discipline	LC Class.	Population	Sample Size	Library Has	% of Population
Anatomy, Physiology and Bacteriology	QM-QR	272	10% - 27 titles	15	56%
Medicine	R-RS	465	10% - 47 titles	16	34%
Agriculture	S-SK	310	10% - 31 titles	2	6%
Technology and Engineering	T-TS	588	10% - 59 titles	16	27%
Home Economics	TX	70	30% - 21 titles	0	
Military	U-UG	215	10% - 22 titles	1	5%
Naval Science	V-VM	94	15% - 14 titles	1	7%
Bibliography and Library Science	Z	1,174	5% - 59 titles	13	22%

It should be remembered, Books for College Libraries serves as a model of what a well-balanced, undergraduate subject collection should be. There is little doubt that it must be augmented by other bibliographic materials of specialized nature to support the present and projected curricula on this campus--or for that reason--any university campus.

As funds for building library collections become scarcer, priorities become harsh realities. It seems that the order of the first priority should be acquisitions of materials which are indispensable to the support of present and projected curricula. The second priority should be creation of a well-balanced collection.[14] If these are to be the guidelines, then some of the data in Table II can be disregarded. For instance, it is evident the library has literally next to nothing to offer in the subject areas of military and naval sciences. But then, the university offers no courses in these subjects.[15]

True, Books for College Libraries is not an up-to-date bibliography.[16] Even so, it has not outlived its usefulness. Its relative usefulness, of course, will vary from one discipline to another. In medicine (R-RS), and technology and engineering (T-TS) there has been a great deal of recent noteworthy works published, which either update or supersede prior knowledge. The same, of course, can not be said for history or the literatures. Here an additive process--if you wish--is continuing to take place. New works are published, reviewed, read and judged on their merits. The respective disciplines are being further enriched. In most instances, the process does not obscure the stature of the older works--they tend to retain their significance.

[14]Manuel D. Lopez, "A Guide for Beginning Bibliographers," Library Resources and Technical Services, 13 (Fall, 1969), 465.

[15]Purdue University Calumet Campus, Registration Report: Fall Semester 1973, Spring Semester 1973/74, Summer Session, 1974. (Hammond, Ind.)

[16]New Edition is being scheduled for publication in 1975.

In spite of the limitations, the study does serve a useful purpose. It is felt the percentage figures in Table II are indicative, in most instances, of the strength and weakness of the basic book collection in qualitative terms. With a few notable exceptions, most disciplines do not measure up favorably to the selected standard of reference. History--United States (E 151-F 1-975) is one of the exceptions. On the absolute scale of 100, the library has 68% of the titles. This is remarkable.[17] Now, to what extent this is due to the numerical strength is not clear. To be sure, a quantitative/qualitative correlation of some kind does exist for each of the disciplines surveyed. There is also good reason to believe that the qualitative-to-quantitative ratio varies widely from discipline to discipline, in this library. If need be, the ratios can be determined in due time. At the present, only inference to this relationship can be drawn.

No doubt, the data obtained in this study can be subjected to a more detailed analysis. More inferences and observation are possible. The basic book collection can be further compared with other bibliographies. The periodicals currently on subscription and the library's holdings of microform materials can be evaluated--preferably in a few selected disciplines. Source materials can be included. Further study of the library collection, or parts of it, may be in order at some future date. This will depend, to a great extent, on the level of the financial support. Recent book budgets offered very little opportunity for correcting even the known deficiencies in the library's collection. Hopefully, the future will be somewhat brighter.

[17]The library has fewer than 90,000 volumes (not titles)--bound periodicals included. Books for College Libraries contains 53,400 titles; and the universe for HISTORY--United States consists of 2,787 titles.

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